

# Pragmatic Approaches to Developing Better Pronunciation in EFL Settings

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English is the dominant language of communication in the international arena. This makes it all the more important for English students to learn speaking with standard pronunciation. If we have a round-table discussion in English among individuals with different L1 backgrounds, for communication to be facilitated, participants will need to speak without much variation in pronunciation.

## §1 General American English and Received Pronunciation.

It is true that English learners should not place any value judgments on advantages of learning one type of English over another. Nevertheless, the country with the largest number of native speakers of English is by far the United States, home to approximately two-third of the world's native speakers of English. The country second on the list is the United Kingdom. The large difference in population between the two countries, along with their contrasting economic activities, has made American English more of a major dialect and British English a secondary model of World English.

The typical American English spoken natively is referred to as General American English (GAE). It was commonly defined to be the speech of native English speakers of the upper Middle West United States, neither the types of speech usually observed in the Southeast, New York City, nor in eastern New England. However, its definition appears to have shifted. Today, GAE covers multiple of variations without any of the stereotypical features of regional speech.

The primary variety of standard British English speech is termed Received Pronunciation (RP). It shows no regional variation and is standard among the upper-middle class, though it is spoken natively by only about 3 to 5% of the people in the United Kingdom. This speech type was used by the upper class of the southeast midland and was commonly heard at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. RP was regarded as the

accent of education, prestige, authority, social status, and economic power. It was once called as "BBC English," though BBC announcers recently have been known to use a wider variety of accents. Today, as a result of change in traditional values, attitudes toward the RP accent are changing.

Some noticeable features distinguish the sound system of GAE from RP. Here is a joke demonstrating a difference in consonant pronunciation between the two sound systems.

Behind this joke is a unique GAE feature: The two-consonant cluster /ns/ is likely to be pronounced as a three-consonant cluster /nts/. Therefore, "prince" and "prints" sound almost the same in GAE, which is the key to the joke above. As to vowel sounds, such pairs as *cot/caught* and *don/dawn* are usually pronounced identically, which is not the case in RP.

## §2 Segmental or suprasegmental?

We often hear that correct pronunciation is one of the keys to establishing effective and successful communication. However, what do we mean by "correct pronunciation"? The term sometimes sounds too general and ambiguous. It definitely refers to some sound system in the language.

The English sound system constitutes two types of features: segmental and suprasegmental. Segmental features involve pronunciation of individual sounds, either vowels or consonants. Suprasegmental means above or beyond individual sounds, such factors as intonation patterns, rhythm and stress, in longer stretches of discourse. Both features of the sound

### Snow White joke

Question: What did the clerk tell Snow White when she complained that her photographs were not ready yet?

Answer: Someday your prints will come.

system need to be learned. This is the rationale for pronunciation practice.

In communication-oriented English learning, errors on the segmental level may be considered local errors, or those that will not cause major misunderstandings among listeners. On the other hand, errors on the suprasegmental level may be regarded as global errors, or those that can have an impact on whether speakers accurately convey their intended messages.

This by no means implies that learners may drop the commitment to learning segmental features. Both aspects must be given equal weight in pronunciation learning and practice. This challenge is sure to promote correct pronunciation in students.

The following are some approaches to teaching the English sound system. Methods of teaching segmental features are discussed first, followed by discussions on teaching the suprasegmental aspects of spoken English.

## 1 Segmental features

Teaching segmental features involves teaching each individual sound in the vowel and consonant inventories. Here are some examples of how segmental aspects of the English sound system can be taught.

### Segmental (1/7) (aspiration of stop voiceless sounds)

Students say the word “pen” with a strip of paper held in front of their mouths. When properly pronounced, a big puff of air forces the paper to move.

This activity serves to raise students’ awareness of aspirated stop consonants. Stop consonants, in particular the voiceless stops /p/, /t/, and /k/, are pronounced with a strong airstream at the beginning of words, such as “pen,” “time,” and “come.”

Aspiration does not occur when voiceless stop consonants are located in the middle or at the end of words, such as “spin” or “sheep.” However, a strong aspiration does occur even in the middle of words, such as “appeal,” “attend,” and “akin,” in which voiceless stop consonants are followed by stressed vowels.

Variation:

- Instead of the strip hanging in front of a mouth, a candle can also be used. The aspirated release of stop consonants blows it out.

### Segmental (2/7) (minimal-pair practice: voiced or voiceless consonants)

The teacher pronounces the following pairs of words. Students closely observe the common differences between each pair and repeat after the model.

{ vase / <u>v</u> eɪs/	{ either /i: ð <u>ə</u> r/
{ face / <u>f</u> eɪs/	{ ether /i: θ <u>ə</u> r/
{ zeal / <u>z</u> i: l/	{ allusion /əlu: ʒ <u>ə</u> n/
{ eal / <u>s</u> i: l/	{ Aleutian /əlu: ʃ <u>ə</u> n/
{ gin /dʒ <u>g</u> ɪn/	{ buy / <u>b</u> aɪ/
{ chin /tʃ <u>ch</u> ɪn/	{ pie / <u>p</u> aɪ/
{ dime / <u>d</u> aɪm/	{ good / <u>g</u> ud/
{ time / <u>t</u> aɪm/	{ could /k <u>u</u> d/

This practice is so-called minimal-pair practice. A minimal pair is a set of two words with different meanings that differ in only one segment of pronunciation. Accordingly, the above pairs are all minimal pairs.

Speech sounds fall into the following two groups: voiced or voiceless sounds. Voiced sounds are pronounced with vibration of the vocal cords, and voiceless sounds are produced without this vibration. All vowels are voiced in English.

Some consonants have voiced and voiceless pair partners (i.e., they are the same in where and how the sounds are produced, and differ only in voicing). Each pair of words in the above includes such partners (the top one is voiced; the bottom one is voiceless) and serves to raise the awareness of voicing.

Students feel their throats to see if the sounds are voiced or voiceless. Another way to distinguish between voiced and voiceless sounds is to place both hands firmly on the ears. When voiced sounds are produced, we will hear a deep boom in our heads or feel its vibration. This will not occur with the voiceless sounds.

### Segmental (3/7) (minimal-pair practice: difficult sounds)

Students practice the following four pairs of words, so that they will learn to distinguish sounds between each pair (when having problems in those sounds).

{ d <u>ir</u> t	{ f <u>a</u> n	{ s <u>ea</u>	{ t <u>h</u> ink
{ d <u>ar</u> t	{ f <u>u</u> n	{ s <u>he</u>	{ s <u>i</u> nk

Minimal-pair practice is useful for helping learners distinguish sounds they find hard to recognize as different. The first pair above can be practiced if students have a problem distinguishing between /ə: r/ (top) and /a: r/ (bottom) (/r/ is most likely to be pronounced in GAE), and the other pairs can be used to practice differences between, /æ/ and /ʌ/, /s/ and /ʃ/, /θ/ and /s/, respectively.

English learners with similar L1 background often share the same problems in distinguishing English sounds. For Arabic native speakers, such a challenge would be the difference between /p/ and /b/ at the beginning of words, so they would probably say, “There are some bears in the garden” when meaning to say, “There are some pears in the garden.”

For German native speakers, a common problem is distinguishing /dʒ/ and /tʃ/ at the beginning of words, so they would say, “I am choking” instead of, “I am joking.” This is exactly the type of situation where minimal-pair practice can be seen.

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**Segmental (4/7)**  
**(minimal-pair practice: “a cap” or “a cup”)**

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First:

The teacher writes the words “CAP” and “CUP” side by side wide apart on the board.

Second:

Student A stands in the front facing the class. The teacher stands in the back and mimes putting on a cap or drinking tea.

Third:

The student says “CAP” or “CUP” according to the mime. Other students, seated facing forward, raise their right or left hands according to which word they think they heard the student say.

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This is another example of a minimal-pair practice, but is different from the two mentioned above: Students here need to understand the meanings of the words in the pair. This activity helps students distinguish the correct pronunciation of vowels included in “cap” and “cup.” It is self-evident to the student standing in front which word was intended. Before starting, the teacher can show the model pronunciation with students repeating after her several times.

Variation:

- Instead of acting out, the teacher stands in the back with a card that reads “cap” on one side and “cup” on the other. The student in front says “CAP” or “CUP” according to which side the teacher shows.

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**Segmental (5/7)**  
**(with the help of realia in a meaningful context)**

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T: (*Showing a toy train to students*) Now, class, take a look at here. What is it? A toy...what?

S<sub>1</sub>: Train.

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In this example, the two-consonant cluster /tr/ included in the word “train” is targeted. However, the teacher does not have students practice the target sound directly, for example, “Let’s see if you make /tr/ sound correctly. Repeat after me...”

Without doing this, the teacher first has students focus on the conveyance of meaning and it is a good way to check on the pronunciation as it is naturally produced. Words used for this purpose must be familiar to learners in order for the practice to be useful and well accepted. Realia or props can be replaced with pictures or drawings.

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**Segmental (6/7)**  
**(in the context)**

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T: Let’s go over how to say each day of the week. Sunday comes after Saturday. What comes after Thursday?

S<sub>1</sub>: Friday.

T: Now, do some math. Two plus six makes eight. Then, two plus two makes what?

S<sub>2</sub>: Four.

T: Next, some practice with numbers. Three comes before four. What comes before six?

S<sub>3</sub>: (*drifting off*)...Yes...Uh...the morning paper.

Class: (*laughs*)

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The teacher in this example is trying to ensure that students produce /f/ sound correctly. However, she realizes their implicit ability because they concentrate on what to say rather than how to say it. Instead of eliciting words in which the target sound is present straightaway, this activity first calls attention to other words and then to the target words. This consideration makes the activity unique.

Variation:

- Students make a short sentence by using a word with the target sound. When they complete their sentences, they can orally present their work. In this case as well, they focus on getting the messages across to the audience.

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**Segmental (7/7)**  
**(in a gossip game)**

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First:

Students at the end of each line receive the following direction written on slips, and repeat it to someone in front of them.

Second:

Students pass it on orally all the way down to the front. The ones in the front row in each line will do as they are told.

*(written on slips of paper)*

**Draw a mouth on the board.**

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A gossip game is useful when the teacher wants to make sure that students can identify a particular sound, and this activity reveals a rather entertaining side of segmental training.

In the example above, the teacher checks whether students can distinguish between the consonants /θ/ and /s/. Some students may draw a “mouse” instead of a “mouth.” Similarly, the teacher may use the sentence “Show me your bag” for the difference between /g/ and /k/. Some students may show their *backs* instead.

The interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are distinctive features of the English sound system, so much so that they can be a serious challenge to students. It is always useful to illustrate how they are produced, that is, by protruding the tip of the tongue slightly.

## **2 Suprasegmental features**

Suprasegmental features implies sound characteristics beyond individual sounds, such as stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns. Here are some examples of exercises focusing on those items.

1) Stress

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**Suprasegmental (1/7)**  
**(stressed words: GREEN house or green HOUSE)**

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T: I have two pictures here. One is a picture of a GREEN house (*stressing GREEN*) and the other one is a green HOUSE (*stressing HOUSE*). (*placing the two picture side by side wide apart on the board*) Now please respond by saying “a GREEN house” or “a green HOUSE.” This one is ... (*pointing at the picture of a GREEN house*). Class!

Ss: (*in unison*) A green HOUSE.

T: And that one? (*pointing at the other one*)

Ss: (*in unison*) A GREEN house.

*(after repeating the above exercise a few times)*

T: Now, let's do it individually. This one?

Any volunteers?

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This activity helps students observe the difference between compound nouns (e.g., GREEN house) and nouns modified by an adjective (e.g., green HOUSE) as they pronounced in the context. A GREEN house is where we grow flowers and vegetables, and a green HOUSE is a one painted green.

Here are some other pairs of the same type.

- cold cream
  - 1) COLD cream (=something we put on the face)
  - 2) cold CREAM (=something we put on fruit)
- head doctor
  - 1) HEAD doctor (=psychiatrist)
  - 2) head DOCTOR (=chief of staff)
- strong man
  - 1) STRONG man (=man of political influence)
  - 2) strong MAN (=man with a lot of physical power)

Variation:

- Instead of using pictures, the teacher can give words describing or associated with a GREEN house or a green HOUSE, and students say accordingly either of the two. For example, “I live in a” is for “a green HOUSE” and “Tomatoes are grown in” is for the other one.

## 2) Stress and rhythm

### Suprasegmental (2/7) (stress and rhythm: with the help of “chants”)

The teacher reads the following sentences one by one as he beats time, such as with clapping hands on the words highlighted in *italics*. Students repeat after her keeping the rhythm.

T:	<i>Birds</i>	<i>eat</i>	<i>snails.</i>
Ss:	<i>Birds</i>	<i>eat</i>	<i>snails.</i>
T:	A <i>bird</i>	<i>eats</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
Ss:	A <i>bird</i>	<i>eats</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
T:	A <i>bird</i>	will <i>eat</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
Ss:	A <i>bird</i>	will <i>eat</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
T:	A <i>bird</i>	will be <i>eating</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
Ss:	A <i>bird</i>	will be <i>eating</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
T:	A <i>bird</i>	should have <i>eaten</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
Ss:	A <i>bird</i>	should have <i>eaten</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
T:	A <i>bird</i>	should have been <i>eating</i>	a <i>snail.</i>
Ss:	A <i>bird</i>	should have been <i>eating</i>	a <i>snail.</i>

This drill is called “chants.” In English sentences, stress usually falls on content words (e. g., nouns, main verbs, adverbs, adjectives, interrogative pronouns), whereas function words (e. g., articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, personal pronouns, conjunctions) are usually unstressed. Interestingly enough, stresses occur at fixed intervals. This explains the rhythm of English speech. English is a stress-timed language, and the length of time needed to say a sentence depends on the number of stressed words it contains.

In each of the five sentences above, stress falls on the three content words: “bird(s),” “eat (eating, eaten),” and “snail(s).” Thus, those sentences are uttered with a 1-2-3 beat. To keep this sentence rhythm, unstressed “will,” “will be,” “should have,” and “should have been,” which are all function words, will be pronounced in a quicker, or reduced manner (“should have” and “should have been” may sound like “shoulda” and “shouldabe,” respectively). Therefore, “chants” with its accompanying rhythmic beat, allows students to easily learn this significant feature of English speech.

“Chants” appears to have a beneficial effect on students who natively speak a syllable-timed language, such as Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Polish. In these languages, each syllable receives the same timing and length, and as a result, the number of syllables in a sentence determines the time it takes to pronounce.

## 3) Prominence

### Suprasegmental (3/7) (prominence: stress on emphasized words)

Students think about the situations where the following three responses are likely to occur.

- I'M listening. (“I'M” is stressed.)
- I AM listening. (“AM” is stressed.)
- I am LISTENING. (“LISTENING” is stressed.)

Generally, content words are usually stressed and function words are unstressed. However, at times, the speaker's intentions, or state of mind, take precedence, and stress may occur on words s/he wants to emphasize. The activity here is for students to build their awareness of this phenomenon, or as is often referred to as prominence.

Each prominence above most likely reflects the responses to the following.

- “Who's listening?”  
“I'M listening. (I don't know about others.)”
- “Why aren't you listening?” or “Listen to me.”  
“I AM listening. (Yes, I am all ears.)”
- “What are you doing?”  
“I am LISTENING. (I am not singing.)”

After the teacher's model presentation of the three patterns of questions and responses, students may practice them in pairs.

Below is an example in which stress falls on a preposition. The speaker's concern is whether addressees agree or disagree with a tax hike.

Are you all FOR the tax hike or AGAINST it?

### Suprasegmental (4/7) (prominence: stress on new information)

Students work in pairs to think about which words will be stressed in the following context. They then perform the lines with their partners.

- A: Look at the car!  
B: The white car?  
A: The white car with stripes on it.  
Blue and yellow stripes.

Here is another example where stress does not necessarily fall on content words. In the example above, stress will be placed on words that are brought up as

new pieces of information in the flow of communication.

At the sentence level, the primary stress appears on a content word toward the end of a sentence. This suggests that for “The white car?” in the second line, “car” would receive the primary stress if the speaker’s thoughts, or intentions, are not taken into account. In the example above, however, “white” is more stressed because it is a new piece of information. Likewise, in the last line, “blue and yellow” receives more stress than “stripes.”

Obviously, in the first line, “car” is more stressed and in the third line, “stripes” is more stressed than other words in their respective lines.

#### 4) Intonation

##### **Suprasegmental (5/7)** **(intonation patterns in question tags)**

Students in pairs observe the following two dialogs between A and B, and note how intonation goes at the end of question tags. They then act out the dialogs.

Dialog 1 (*about the holiday weekend*)

A: You said you’d visit Paris. How was the weather?

B: Amazing!

A: You had a nice weekend, didn’t you?

B: Oh, yes.

Dialog 2 (*about the holiday weekend*)

A: You said you’d visit Paris. How was the weather?

B: A bit chilly.

A: You had a nice weekend, didn’t you?

B: Oh, yes.

When people speak, they usually modulate their voices: raise or lower the pitch, pronounce some syllables more loudly than others, and change their speech rhythm. This phenomenon is termed intonation.

Getting to perform a dialog is not just reading aloud. The exercise here helps students become aware of differences in intonation between the two question tags.

In tag questions, we can express exact meanings by intonation. When we are not seeking any particular information, or when we are sure of the answer, falling intonation is applied. When we need some information, or when we are not sure of the answer, rising intonation is used. In Dialog 1, A ends the underlined question with falling intonation because A is certain of B’s response from the context. In Dialog 2, A is doubtful

whether B really had a nice weekend, and the sentence ends with rising intonation.

##### **Suprasegmental (6/7)** **(intonation patterns: three types)**

Students in pairs observe the following three different dialogs. Each pair discusses how differently the three “whats” are pronounced and then performs the dialogs.

Dialog 1

A: I saw a good movie.

B: What? (=What movie did you see?)

A: *Japanese Story*. It’s an Australian movie.

Dialog 2

A: I saw a good movie.

B: What? (= I didn’t hear you. Could you say that again?)

A: I said, “I saw a good movie.”

Dialog 3

A: I saw a good movie.

B: What? (= I don’t believe you. You are always saying you don’t like the movies.)

A: Oh, believe me.

(adapted from Celce-Murcia, M. et al 2000:212)

The three “whats” have different meanings from each other, and are pronounced with contrasting intonations to convey them.

In Dialog 1, B says “What?” with falling intonation, as is usually the case for interrogative sentences starting with wh-words and “how.” In Dialog 2, B could not catch what A said and just wants B to repeat it. Therefore, B says “What?” with rising intonation.

Besides the functions mentioned in the last exercise, intonation also conveys attitudes or emotions, such as love, hate, satisfaction, disappointment, excitement, boredom, happiness, and sadness. Although regional and individual variation in real-life speech does occur, intonation still involves definite patterns and rules. In Dialog 3, the reaction of B to what A said is one of amazement and disbelief, and B thus pronounces “What?” emotionally and emphatically with a strong rising intonation.



## 5) Back-chaining

### Suprasegmental (7/7) (back-chaining)

T: First listen to this carefully. “How many times have you been to New York?” Now class, repeat after me. “to New *York*?”

Ss: “to New *York*?”

T: “have *been* to New *York*?”

Ss: “have *been* to New *York*?”

T: “How many *times* have you *been* to New *York*?”

Ss: “How many *times* have you *been* to New *York*?”

Italicized words are stressed in the sentence.

This activity is intended to ease difficulties in natural production of target sentences. When the teacher has students repeat a sentence, she typically breaks it down into smaller parts. She then starts with the first part of the sentence and adds the following parts one after another. This is a general way to help learners pronounce target sentences. However, repeating like this can be boring and tiresome.

To keep the practice challenging (and fun), the teacher uses the “back-chaining” technique outlined above. Students start with the last part of the sentence and work backwards one bit at a time to the beginning. This step-by-step procedure can prevent them from becoming disengaged by the simple repetition.

In fact, a bigger benefit of back-chaining is its effectiveness in maintaining the correct and natural English intonation throughout the practice. This is because the intonation patterns of an English sentence are determined by the word receiving major sentence stress toward the end of the sentence (“*York*” in the example above).

## §3 Sound modifications

Sound modifications may occur in any language people speak. They occur when special sounds are connected to one another in words, phrases, or sentences in a natural flow of spoken languages.

Sound modifications are so common in spoken English that they can play a role in jokes on daily language use. The following story illustrates this.

A student approached the librarian saying, “I would like to borrow ‘Of My Cement’ by Steinbeck.” The student’s misunderstanding was perhaps caused by the similar sounds between “Of My Cement” and “Of Mice

and Men.” The anecdote shows how common and influential sound modifications are in everyday speech.

This section discusses activities to make students conscious of sound modifications in English speech and help improve their listening and speaking skills.

## 1 Flapping

### Flapping of the intervocalic /t/

The teacher explains that /t/ sound between vowels is pronounced like /d/ in a casual speech. Students consider which /t/ sound will be pronounced in that manner in the following conversation. There will be seven cases.

Patty: Tom, what are you doing this evening?  
Tom: Eating alone. What about you, Patty?  
Patty: Well, Mat and I are meeting the Rods for dinner. Can you come?  
Tom: Cool! Thanks for inviting me.

(adapted from Celce-Murcia, M. et al 2000 : 73)

The focus here is on the unique language feature termed “intervocalic/t/” (/t/sandwiched between vowels) or “flapped/t/.” The flapping occurs particularly when the vowel before the /t/ sound is more stressed than the following vowel, in such words as “beauty” and “city.” Consequently, such pairs of words as “latter and ladder” and “putting and pudding” sound almost identical and are inherently difficult to distinguish.

The flapped /t/ is commonly transcribed as /D/ or /f/, but other signs are also used in some dictionaries, such as /ṭ/ and /ṭ̬/. This allophonic feature of /t/ was long considered typical of GAE, but the general consensus is that it is noticeable among young native speakers of English in other parts of the world.

The flapped /t/ can be found not only within word, but also between words in a sentence. Here are some examples.

- Get out of here! → /geDəuDəhrə/
- Shut up! → /ʃəDəp/
- Beat it! → /bi:Dət/

Accordingly, flapping is expectedly to occur at the following seven spots in the sample dialog above (indicated with underlines).

Patty: Tom, what are you doing this evening?

Tom: Eating alone. What about you, Patty?

Patty: Well, Mat and I are meeting the Rods for dinner. Can you come?

Tom: Cool! Thanks for inviting me.

## 2 Linking

### Linking

Each student asks three different classmates the following question and writes down the responses.  
(a worksheet for students)

Question :

What time do you wake up on a Sunday morning?

ST<sub>1</sub> (name ) At (time ) .

ST<sub>2</sub> ( ) At ( ) .

ST<sub>3</sub> ( ) At ( ) .

This activity is oriented for the students to focus on and practice “linking” in a meaningful context. Linking is a type of sound modification and is defined as a way of joining, or linking, two words in a natural and smooth flow of spoken English. When linking occurs, these two words do not always sound the same as those pronounced individually.

In the above question—What time do you wake up on a Sunday morning?— the target cases of linking include the following.

#### 1) A consonant followed by the identical consonant

When the consonant at the end of a word is identical to the beginning consonant of the following word, the two consonants are uttered as one long consonant.

Thus, /t/ in “what” and /t/ in “time” are usually pronounced as one /t/.

#### 2) A consonant followed by a vowel

When a word that ends with a consonant is followed by a vowel in the next word, the consonant sounds like part of the following word.

As a result of this, what occurs in the above is

“wake up on a” → /weikəpənə/ rather than /weik/, /əp/, /ən/ and /ə/.

## 3 Assimilation

### Assimilation

Each student asks three different classmates the following question and writes down the responses.  
(a worksheet for students)

Question :

Where would you like to live, in Cairo, in New York, or in Paris?

ST<sub>1</sub> (name ) In (place ) .

ST<sub>2</sub> ( ) In ( ) .

ST<sub>3</sub> ( ) In ( ) .

This activity is oriented for the students to learn and practice what is described as assimilation. Assimilation is a case where a sound changes and becomes more like another sound that follows (or precedes) it.

In the question—Where would you like to live, in Cairo, in New York, or in Paris?— the target assimilation items include the following.

#### 1) Palatalization

When a word that ends with consonants /t/ or /d/ is followed by the consonant /j/, they become /tʃ/ or /dʒ/, respectively. Assimilation of this type is termed palatalization. This is so called because in this case the alveolar consonants /t/ and /d/ are made further back in the mouth cavity near to the hard palate (/t/ and /d/ are usually made at the tooth ridge), where the semi-vowel /j/ is produced.

Therefore, what occurs here is

“would you” → /wudʒə/, not /wud/ and /jə/.

#### 2) Assimilation of nasals

The alveolar nasal /n/ is changed into the other nasals /m/ or /ŋ/ in a casual speech according to the sound that immediately follows. This is particularly true for the /n/ at the end of function words. That is, when an “in” is followed by a bilabial consonant, such as /m/, /p/, and /b/, the “in” is pronounced /ɪm/, and when an “in” is followed by a velar consonant, such as /k/ and /g/, the “in” becomes /ɪŋ/.

Thus, what occurs in the example above is

• “in Cairo” → /ɪŋ kairou/

• “in New York” → /ɪn nju: jɔ:k/

(No assimilation occurs here.)

• “in Paris” → /ɪm pærəs/

## 4 Jokes to illustrate sound modifications

### Knock-knock jokes

Students read out the following joke and think about why it is funny.

A: Knock, knock.

B: Who's there?

A: Pudding.

B: Pudding who?

A: Pudding on your shoes before your pants is a bad idea.



This is an example of a knock-knock joke. It provides the teacher with a good opportunity to explain unique features of sound modifications in a humorous setting. The punch line (or the last line that makes us laugh) is funny because two words or more produce unexpected sound similarities based on pronunciation modification.

The point in the joke above is the similarity in sound between “pudding” and “putting” because of the effect of flapping, or the /t/ sound between vowels in “putting” is tended to be voiced.

The standard format of knock-knock jokes has six lines as shown above. This type of joke is said to have been popular among children and adults in the United Kingdom and United States since the 1930s, and its prototype is found in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, in Act II, scene iii.

Here are some more examples.

A: Knock, knock.  
 B: Who’s there?  
 A: Jamaica.  
 B: Jamaica who?  
 A: Jamaica Mistake. (≡ Did you make a)

A: Knock, knock.  
 B: Who’s there?  
 A: Lettuce.  
 B: Lettuce who.  
 A: Lettuce in, it’s cold. (≡ Let us)

A: Knock, knock.  
 B: Who’s there?  
 A: Felix.  
 B: Felix who.  
 A: Felix my lollipop again, I’ll thump him.  
 (≡ If he licks)

Extension:

- Students in pairs can search the Internet for knock-knock jokes (there are thousands of them), present some orally to the class taking the roles of A and B as shown above. Each pair then explains the punch lines, or has the class think about them.

## §4 To wrap up

This paper is presented to raise awareness of effective approaches to teaching pronunciation in an EFL setting. The author demonstrated the language-learning activities in the preceding sections with the premise that what counts is the well-balanced strategy between segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation learning.

Please note that the teacher is referred to as either “he” or “she” to indicate the fact that teachers may be men or women without any intended significance.

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